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Summary record of the 41st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 4 March 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Effah-Apenteng ..... (Ghana)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Organization of work

Agenda item 121: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Common services at Geneva (*continued*)

Agenda item 122: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

Integrated Management Information System project

Construction of additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Agenda item 123: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*)

Simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations Web site

Review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information

Languages used for preparation of documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Organization of work (A/C.5/56/L.40/Rev.1)

1. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to the proposed programme of work, which had been drawn up by the Bureau on the basis of legislative mandates and the availability of documents. Document A/C.5/56/L.40/Rev.1 contained the list of documents to be considered at the current part of the resumed fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. In proposing its programme of work, the Bureau had been cognizant of the fact that a number of reports had been requested during the main part of the Assembly's fifty-sixth session for consideration by the Committee during the first part of the resumed session. The Bureau had been informed that the reports in question were currently being prepared but would not be issued in time for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, owing to the short period of time available. Accordingly, those reports had not been included in the list of documents for consideration at the current part of the resumed session.

The meeting was suspended at 10.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.05 a.m.

2. **Mr. Soto** (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland, said that the presentation of the Under-Secretary-General for Management on the financial situation of the United Nations should outline the expected trends in expenditure for peacekeeping operations beyond the current budget year so that Member States could plan their budget allocations more rationally.

3. With regard to the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), the European Union was generally inclined to endorse the Advisory Committee's recommendations. The task of mainstreaming IMIS into the overall administration of the United Nations, however, had not been completed in the case of the International Tribunals and peacekeeping operations. All IMIS activities should be reflected and clearly explained in the context of the Organization's wider strategy in the field of information technology.

4. The European Union attached great importance to the work of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and agreed that the expansion of the Organization's humanitarian and development activities in Africa had led to increased demand for office space at ECA. The Committee should base its decision in the matter on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

5. The Union noted with regret that the report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/259 on United Nations publications had not been submitted at the current part of the resumed session of the General Assembly, but welcomed the submission by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of a number of very important reports.

6. The European Union endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendations on the proposed budget for the International Tribunals. It was also committed to the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), which should be provided with adequate financial resources. On the question of the mandatory age of separation, however, it planned to seek clarification of the precise implications of any change in the age of separation before taking any decision on the matter, either at the current part of the resumed fifty-sixth session or at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

7. Lastly, the European Union was of the view that the two weeks available to the Committee for the first part of the resumed session would be more than sufficient to allow the Committee to complete its work on time and without recourse to night and weekend meetings. Moreover, given its concern at the large number of important items that had been deferred to the resumed session, consideration should be given to dispensing altogether in future years with the part of the resumed session usually held in March.

8. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), speaking as coordinator of the Group of 77 and China for Fifth Committee matters, noted that a number of reports on items that were to have been taken up at the current part of the resumed fifty-sixth session of the Assembly were not yet available. The Group of 77 and China would like to have an opportunity to comment on the proposed programme of work at the Committee's next meeting and therefore wished to request that action be deferred until that meeting.

9. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation shared the concerns just expressed by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Group of 77 and China concerning the non-issuance of documents. He recalled specifically that it had been agreed to take up the report on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) at the current part of the resumed session. It was unacceptable for representatives of the Secretariat to reformulate the decisions of the General Assembly and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should be called upon to explain its failure to issue the report in question.

10. **The Chairman**, in response to the request of the representative of Cuba, said that action on the proposed programme of work would be deferred to the Committee's next meeting. The Secretariat would be asked to prepare a list of those documents which the Assembly had requested and which were not yet available. Lastly, in response to the concerns raised by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, he would request a representative of the Secretariat to attend the Committee's next meeting to explain the reasons for the non-issuance of the report on UNDOF.

11. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 121: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Common services at Geneva (*continued*) (A/56/417/Rev.1)

12. **The Chairman** recalled that the report of the Secretary-General on the question of common services at Geneva (A/56/417) had been introduced and discussed in the context of the Committee's consideration of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations system common services at Geneva (A/55/856 and Add.1). A revised report of the Secretary-General had now been issued as document A/56/417/Rev.1.

13. **Mr. Gabriel** (Principal Inter-Agency Officer, United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination), introducing the revised report of the Secretary-General on common services at Geneva contained in document A/56/417/Rev.1 on behalf of the secretariat of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), previously known as the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), said that, in spite of the statutory autonomy of each Geneva-based specialized agency and organization, significant collaboration had developed among their executive heads, resulting in increased contact among counterparts at all levels in the various organizations. The results of those efforts were described in the report under the headings of budget and finance, telecommunications, information technology, travel and transportation, medical services and insurance, security services, procurement and contracting, library and archiving services, management of human resources, management of facilities, mail and Diplomatic Pouch services, and conference activities. In follow-up to the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Management Ownership Committee at Geneva had been established under the chairmanship of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

14. Progress towards greater coordination of common services had been made in a number of areas, such as the sharing of electronic information resources through the United Nations System Consortium, and the development of coordinated approaches to the coverage of official and private travel aimed at maximizing bargaining leverage to secure the most favourable conditions and fares for all organizations.

15. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt) said that it would be helpful if copies of the statement just made by the representative of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination could be made available to the members of the Committee.

16. **The Chairman** said that the Committee would continue its consideration of the item in informal consultations.

Agenda item 122: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

Integrated Management Information System project (A/56/602 and Add.1 and A/56/684)

17. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the Integrated Management Information System project (A/56/602 and Add.1), said that the recent implementation of IMIS for payroll processing in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its expected implementation in the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF) in March 2002 would mean that the System was in full operation at all major duty stations. Most of the difficulties encountered had been due to problems with data in earlier versions of the System. Those problems had been rectified, however, and there were currently more than 4,500 active users in United Nations offices.

18. The application had been successfully migrated to Panther software, which would allow IMIS to be enabled on the web. The consolidated database of financial records from all offices where the system was in operation had been used in the preparation of financial statements for December 2001. IMIS was also being used as the source of information for the Key Item Management Reporting System which was being implemented by the Management Policy Office. It remained the only fully integrated software application that met United Nations requirements.

19. The report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the IMIS project (A/56/684) mentioned the limited progress achieved in the implementation of IMIS in peacekeeping operations and the International Tribunals. In 2001, most resources had been focused on implementing the payroll module at the major duty stations, funds and programmes. However, a pilot project had been launched in early 2002 for the deployment of IMIS in one peacekeeping operation and deployment in other field missions and in the International Tribunals was due to take place during 2002. Full deployment in all missions would require the upgrading of the system to the web version. The progress report outlined the long-term strategy for the system; work was due to begin on that basis in 2002.

20. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the Integrated Management Information System project (A/56/684), said that the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the proposal contained in paragraph 66 of the thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General (A/56/602).

21. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation wished to continue discussing the reports on IMIS at the Committee's next meeting. Taking the opportunity provided by the presence of the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services, he said that the cafeteria often closed before the end of the day's meetings, even though the Assistant Secretary-General had undertaken to ensure that it remained open for as long as necessary. Attempts to raise the issue with those responsible for the cafeteria sometimes elicited discourteous responses. If the required service was not being provided, alternative contractors should be considered. Some delegations would also like to know why the cafeteria near the Security Council Chamber had been closed.

22. **Mr. Chandra** (India) noted that the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services had stated that a pilot project for the implementation of IMIS had been launched in one peacekeeping operation, rather than the three that had been mentioned in the thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General. He would like to know whether the operation concerned was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) or the United Nations Logistics Base (UNLB) at Brindisi.

23. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) said that he would respond to the comments made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic at a subsequent meeting. IMIS had been implemented in only one peacekeeping operation because, to date, the priority had been to implement the System at the major duty stations. However, efforts were being made to achieve implementation in all peacekeeping operations as quickly as possible.

Construction of additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa (A/56/672 and A/56/711)

24. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the construction of additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa (A/56/672), said that the report contained an uncontroversial proposal for the construction of additional office facilities, on which he hoped the Committee would take swift action.

25. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/56/711), said that the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the proposal contained in the report of the Secretary-General.

Standards of accommodation for air travel (A/54/382, A/55/488, A/56/7, A/56/426 and A/56/630)

26. **Ms. Ferrena-Mahmud** (Chief of the Oversight Support Unit of the Department of Management), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel contained in documents A/54/382, A/55/488 and A/56/426, said that, during the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999 covered by the first report, there had been 80 exceptions to the standard for a total additional cost to the Organization of $101,939. During the period from 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, there had been a decrease in the number of exceptions, which had been granted mainly on grounds of medical need or to eminent persons, but overall costs had increased because of first-class travel by the President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and despite a decrease in the number of trips by security officers accompanying the Secretary-General. During the period from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001, there had been a 14 per cent decrease in the number of exceptions granted and a 19 per cent decrease in costs. It could therefore be concluded that oversight had resulted in a decrease in the number of exceptions to the standard for air travel and in costs.

27. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/56/630), drew attention to the conclusions and recommendations contained in paragraphs 5 and 7 of the report.

28. **Mr. Siddiqui** (Pakistan) said that, while his delegation noted the reductions in both the number of exceptions and their cost, the total expenditure was still very high. Future reports should include the names of the individuals for whom exceptions to the standard for air travel had been made. New modalities for air travel should be explored as well, since tickets issued from capitals often cost less than tickets issued through the official travel agency. Finally, delays in reimbursement for travel were regrettable and a statement on procedures should be circulated.

Agenda item 123: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*) (A/C.5/56/12, 17 and 19)

Simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations Web site (A/C.5/56/12)

Review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information (A/C.5/56/17)

Languages used for preparation of documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (A/C.5/56/19)

29. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), orally introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations Web site, said that the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/56/12) had been requested by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in paragraph 314 of its report on its forty-first session (A/56/16). The Advisory Committee had been informed that the Official Document System (ODS) had begun operation on 4 September 2001 as a result of the re-engineering of the optical disk system from a proprietary system to a fully web-based system using industry standard technology, such as Windows 2000, Lotus Notes, Microsoft Internet Information Server and magnetic media, which the Advisory Committee welcomed.

30. The Advisory Committee noted from paragraph 4 of the report of the Secretary-General that the Secretariat was working on the second phase of the new ODS project, which was scheduled for completion in January 2002. Once that phase was completed, the new ODS would have full multilingual support functions in the six official languages, in accordance with the rule established in General Assembly resolution 36/117 B and reiterated in resolutions 42/207 C, 50/11 and 53/208 B. Users would be able to search for documents and display them in any of the six official languages.

31. The Advisory Committee had been informed that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/211 F and with paragraph 12 of the Advisory

Committee's report contained in document A/56/475, by the end of January 2002, access to the new ODS would be provided free of charge to Member States, staff members and accredited non-governmental organizations. By the end of that year, the Secretariat would assess the feasibility of providing free access to the public and report to the General Assembly on available options and their financial implications.

32. Orally introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information, he said that the Advisory Committee was of the view that the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/C.5/56/17 was neither comprehensive nor fully responsive to the request for a review of public information activities. The Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should take note of the report.

33. Orally presenting the Advisory Committee's report on languages used for preparation of documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), he recalled that the Advisory Committee had commented on the subject in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/7, paragraph V.74). The Advisory Committee had been informed by its representatives that ESCWA did not have the capacity to translate all publications into Arabic and had expressed concern that, even though ESCWA used large amounts of resources to produce publications, the latter might not be of much use to end-users in the region because they were not always available in Arabic.

34. In its note on the subject (A/C.5/56/19), the Secretariat had concluded that the drafting and translation capacity of ESCWA for the preparation of documents and publications in Arabic appeared to be adequate. However, there was room for improvement in regard to the proportion of documents and publications issued in Arabic. The Secretary-General intended to monitor the situation closely and report on the progress achieved in the context of his proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. It was the intention of the Advisory Committee to follow up on the subject in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. In the meantime, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should take note of the note by the Secretariat.

35. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations Web site (A/C.5/56/12), said that the Official Document System had begun operations on 4 September 2001, as a result of the re-engineering of the optical disk system from a proprietary to an open system. The second phase of the re-engineering project had been completed on 4 February 2002. The new ODS had full multilingual functionality in the six official languages, which would ensure parity among the languages.

36. The current ODS access policy was guided by General Assembly resolution 51/211 F, in which the Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to develop a policy to make the ODS available on a fee-for-service basis to any interested party, on the understanding that the service would be free for Member States and Secretariat staff. Pursuant to the resolution, the Secretary-General had formulated the ODS access policy in his report entitled "Access to the optical disk system" (A/52/803).

37. The United Nations Web site was freely accessible by the public and served as an invaluable tool for dissemination of information about the various activities of the Organization. Since ODS access was currently restricted, some parliamentary documents were included on the United Nations Web site in order to satisfy the demand from non-governmental organizations and the public at large. As such, the parliamentary documents on the Web site were limited in coverage and language versions.

38. In order to ensure the simultaneous availability of parliamentary documents in the six official languages on the United Nations Web site, it would be most practical if ODS were to be made available to the public free of charge, in which case documents could be accessed from the United Nations Web site through a link to the ODS. If the Secretariat were to move forward with that technical solution, the provisions of General Assembly resolution 51/211 F, on ODS access policy would have to be changed. The Secretariat would review the feasibility of free access to the ODS and present Member States with options, including financial implications, with a view to revising the

urrent ODS subscription policy, which was guided by ssembly resolution 51/211 F.

9. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and udget Division), introducing the report of the ecretary-General on the review of public information ctivities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the epartment of Public Information (A/C.5/56/17), said hat the report had been submitted in response to a equest from the Advisory Committee for clarification f what constituted output in the area of public nformation in substantive offices and departments. he Advisory Committee had expressed dissatisfaction ith the general nature of information provided on the ctivities of a number of departments. The report had een overtaken by events, however, as the General ssembly had requested a full report on public nformation activities in the context of the proposed rogramme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, to be ubmitted at its fifty-seventh session.

0. He also introduced the note by the Secretariat on anguages used for preparation of documents and ublications of the Economic and Social Commission or Western Asia (A/C.5/56/19). While the drafting and ranslation capacity of ESCWA for the preparation of locuments and publications in Arabic appeared to be dequate, there was room for improvement in regard to he proportion of documents and publications issued in rabic. At its fifty-sixth session, the General Assembly ad taken action reflecting that fact, and thus the report ad also been overtaken by events.

1. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the dvisory Committee's report on the languages used for he preparation of documents and publications of SCWA should be presented in writing. The note by he Secretariat showed that the Commission's drafting nd translation capacity for the preparation of locuments and publications in Arabic appeared to be dequate. Indeed, the recommendation that all locuments to be submitted to the Commission should, s far as possible, be drafted in Arabic had been made y the Commission itself. Paragraph 6 (b) of the report lso reflected an internal administrative decision of the ommission, which contradicted the General ssembly's resolution on multilingualism, according to hich command of Arabic was sufficient for mployment at ESCWA. That contradiction should be rought to the Commission's attention.

2. With reference to paragraph 9 of the report, it was egrettable that even Arabic-speaking staff members of ESCWA, which did not have any non-Arabic-speaking member States, did not submit draft documents in Arabic. It was a scandal that more documents should be drafted and produced in English than in Arabic at ESCWA and his delegation would not accept executive summaries in Arabic in lieu of a full translation of documents issued in English. That was contrary to the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. At the very least, the Commission should observe the relevant Assembly resolutions on the pattern of conferences, which required the simultaneous distribution of documents in all languages. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the ESCWA secretariat to address the shortcomings with respect to drafting in Arabic and would continue to monitor the issue closely.

43. **Ms. Attwooll** (United States of America) said that her delegation was completely dissatisfied with the report of the Secretary-General on the review of public information activities (A/C.5/56/17). The report's stated goal was to look at the outputs of various departments and at possible overlap between the Department of Public Information and other departments of the Secretariat. Her delegation had been looking forward to a substantive analytical feedback, instead of a list of departments and their activities, without any analysis of their interaction with the Department of Public Information. The Department of Public Information was currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its activities and she hoped that it would re-examine the issue of its interaction with other departments in the context of that review.

44. **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that he would appreciate more information on the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC).

45. **Ms. Gastaut** (Director of the Public Affairs Division of the Department of Public Information) said that JUNIC was a subsidiary body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which brought together all the information directors of the United Nations system to coordinate the system's public information policies. Following the reform of ACC, all of its subsidiary bodies had been abolished in October 2001 and more flexible and efficient mechanisms had been created. The report of the Secretary-General on the new mechanisms would be made available sometime before the session of the Committee on Information scheduled to begin on 22 April 2002.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.